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XXIII.—*On the Notation of Time in China.** By T. F. WADE, Esq.

[*Read June 9th, 1868.*]

THE grand division of Chinese time, chronologically speaking, is the cycle of sixty years. The year is luni-solar. As a lunar year it counts twelve moons, with intercalation of a thirteenth, whenever lunar time falls a whole revolution of the moon behind solar time. But it is farther divided into twenty-four fortnightly terms, which commence and terminate without reference to lunar time, their beginning and ending being marked by the entrance of the sun into the first or the fifteenth degree of a sign of the zodiac.

The first, third, fourth, eighth, and twelfth moons of the lunar year number but twenty-nine days; the remainder thirty days. Thus, the intercalary year will contain three hundred and eighty-four or three hundred and eighty-five days; the ordinary year three hundred and fifty-five days. The fortnightly terms, marching as they do by the side of the sun's progress, must of course shift their places annually in the calendar of the lunar year; but in that of our solar year they are repeated with comparative uniformity. When an intercalary moon occurs, they continue to be reckoned as usual. Whence it happens sometimes that the first of them is brought into the twelfth moon, making thus a twenty-fifth term in the lunar year; but the first term usually falls somewhere in the first moon.

The year has four seasons, each, as with us, possessing a distinctive name; but, otherwise than with us, each season is positively bounded by the first and last days of the four quarters of the year. The change of seasons, as we understand the expression, is much more definitely indicated by the twenty-four terms, each of which has a name that is descriptive. They measure some but fourteen days, some sixteen days, in length; but the average is fifteen days. The following table

* This paper was drawn up merely for the private information of Mr. J. Crawford, in answer to his question, Have the Chinese a week? The works from which most of the matter is drawn are Morrison's *View of China for Philological Purposes*, Macao, 1817; Bridgman's *Canton Chrestomathy*, Macao, 1841; Williams's *Middle Kingdom*, New York and London, 1848; and *A Collection of Archaeological Notices*, abridged, by a Native Author, from a larger work.

will show their titles and the place of each according to our almanac:—

SPRING TERMS.

Feb. 6	○ 15° in Aquarius.	<i>Li Ch'un</i> , commencement of spring.
„ 20	... 1° in Pisces.	<i>Yü Shui</i> , rain.
Mar. 5	... 15° „	<i>Ch'ing Chih</i> , awakening of insect life.
„ 20	... 1° in Aries.	<i>Ch'un Fên</i> , the division of spring (vernal equinox).
April 5	... 15° „	<i>Ch'ing Ming</i> , clear brightness.
„ 20	... 1° in Taurus.	<i>Ku Yü</i> , grain rains.

SUMMER TERMS.

May 5	... 15° in Taurus.	<i>Li Hsia</i> , commencement of summer.
„ 21	... 1° in Gemini.	<i>Hsiao Man</i> , (the ear) slightly filled.
June 6	... 15° „	<i>Mang Chung</i> , the thickening crop.
„ 21	... 1° in Cancer.	<i>Hsia Chih</i> , summer's arrival or culmination (solar solstice).
July 7	... 15° „	<i>Hsiao Shu</i> , small heat.
„ 23	... 1° in Leo.	<i>Ta Shu</i> , great heat.

AUTUMN TERMS.

Aug. 7	... 15° in Leo.	<i>Li Ch'iu</i> , commencement of autumn.
„ 23	... 1° in Virgo.	<i>Ch'u Shu</i> , heat controlled.
Sept. 8	... 15° „	<i>Pai Lu</i> , white dew.
„ 23	... 1° in Libra.	<i>Ch'iu Fên</i> , autumnal equinox.
Oct. 8	... 15° „	<i>'Han Lu</i> , cold dew.
„ 23	... 1° in Scorpio.	<i>Shuang Chiang</i> , descent of frost.

WINTER TERMS.

Nov. 7	... 15° in Scorpio.	<i>Li Tung</i> , commencement of winter.
„ 22	... 1° in Sagittarius.	<i>Hsiao Hsüeh</i> , little snow.
Dec. 7	... 15° „	<i>Ta Hsüeh</i> , great snow.
„ 22	... 1° in Capricorn.	<i>Tung Chih</i> , winter solstice.
Jan. 6	... 15° „	<i>Hsiao 'Han</i> , slight cold.
„ 21	... 1° in Aquarius.	<i>Ta 'Han</i> , great cold.

There is no sub-division of the Chinese moon corresponding to our week; but it does sub-divide into a first, middle, and last decade, the last being the only one affected by the varying length of the moon before noticed.

The day and night, as a whole, are divided into twelve two-hour periods, each with a distinctive name, of which more presently; and each of the two-hour periods contains eight sections, literally notches, minor periods of fifteen minutes each. The night, from about 7 P.M. to 5 A.M., is divided into five changes, each of two hours. But before going farther, we must return to the cyclic method.

The cycle of sixty years is of great antiquity. Tradition tells that it was introduced by the minister of a sovereign of prehistoric times, some twenty-six centuries before the Christian era. This was in the sixty-first year of Huang-Ti, by whose command it was invented, a date which, as our year

1863 was the last of the seventy-fifth cycle, should correspond to the year B.C. 2637.

Each year is distinguished by a combination of two Chinese characters; the first of which is one of a series of ten that recurs six times during the cycle; and the second, one of a separate series of twelve, which is repeated five times during the same period. The series of ten is distinguished by the Chinese as the series of the stems, that of the twelve as the series of the branches. The former are supposed to represent different departments of inanimate, the latter of animated, nature; the latter are farther used to designate the twelve two-hour periods into which, as above stated, the day and night are distributed; also, as titles of the signs of the zodiac; also, to divide and subdivide the bearings of the compass, and for other similar purposes. In the records of a reign, the days of the month are marked by the cyclic combinations of stem and branch. Historical writers, when referring to events, establish their date by naming the dynasty, the style of the reign, and either the cyclic year, or, which is a more common usage, the place of the year in the reign, or a particular part of the reign, its number; that is, from the first year in which the style mentioned was adopted. This explicitness is rendered necessary by the fact that in some cases there have been many styles in one reign. When an emperor ascends the throne, there are submitted to him, for selection, certain combinations of characters as the style by which his reign is to be known. This is not the emperor's name, which, after his accession, should be no more spoken or written, but the *kuo 'hao*, state or government designation. Thus, during the reign (1820-1850) of the emperor with whom we first went to war, the *kuo 'hao* was *Tao Kuang*. These two words elliptically represent the following four, *ch'i tao ta kuang*, "illustriousness of well-doing", which occur in a passage in the ancient and imperfectly understood *Yi Ching*, or Book of Symbolical Changes. Their meaning can only be explained by a perusal of the whole passage, which runs thus: "To benefit those below at the expense of those above is *ch'i tao ta kuang*, the greatest glory of principles, or the most glorious of principles", *sc.* of principles that should direct the government of a state. This style, or motto, was chosen, it is said, as a protest against the sale of rank to which the government of the previous reign had largely resorted.

On the death of the emperor in question, in 1850, his son and successor took the style *Hsien Feng*, "Universal Plenteousness"; the reign of his father having been remarkable for dearth. He again was succeeded, in 1861, by the present

ruler, then a child of some six years of age. The camarilla, who had absorbed all power in the reign of the father, forged a decree constituting them a council of regency, and chose for the new reign the style *Ch'i Hsiang*, "good fortune"; but on their overthrow, two months later, this was exchanged for *T'ung Chih*, "union for order",—an appeal to the patriotism of all ranks to unite for the suppression of the organised brigandage then, as it is still, disturbing the empire. Historically, therefore, we are in the seventh year of the reign T'ung Chih of the Ta Ch'ing dynasty.

In earlier times, we find emperors frequently substituting one *kuo 'hao* for another; some as often as thirteen times in a reign, to the great embarrassment of the student of history. It is observable that the practice, which was of course suggested by superstition, its object being to change the emperor's luck, has not been recurred to since the expulsion of the Mongolian dynasty in 1366.

After death, the emperor is *personally* spoken of by his *miao hao*, the title, that is, by which he has been canonised; but the events in any reign, as before observed, will be described as occurring either in such a year of such a *kuo 'hao*, the year in question being distinguished by a number, or by a cyclical combination prefixed to it. The treaty of Nanking, for instance, would be referred to as concluded either in the twenty-second year of Tao Kuang, or in the year *ting wei* of Tao Kuang, our year 1842.

"*The Book of Records*,"* says Dr. Williams, "contains some remarkable notices of the orders given by Yau to his astronomers Hi and Ho to ascertain the solstices and the equinoxes, and employ intercalary months, and fix the four seasons, in order that the husbandman might know when to commit his seed to the ground. If the time of the Deluge be reckoned, according to Hales, at B.C. 3155, there will be an interval of about eight centuries to the days of Yau, B.C. 2357, which would be ample time for the observation that the primitive sacred year in Noah's time was wrong, and that the lunar year of about 354 days was also wrong, and required additional correction, which this ancient monarch is said to have effected by an intercalation of seven lunar months in nineteen years, like the metonic cycle of the Greeks. It is also remarkable that the time given as the date of the commencement of the astronomical observations, sent to Aristotle from Babylon by command of Alexander, should be B.C. 2233, or only a few years before the death of Yau: at that time, the five additional days

* Shu Ching.

to complete the solar year were intercalated by the Chaldeans, and celebrated with great mirth as days of festivity. * * * The intercalation made by Yao has continued with little variation to this day, the Romish missionaries having rectified the calendar, as much as it needed, on their arrival in the country, and continued its preparation since that time" (*The Middle Kingdom*, vol. ii, 147-8).

The Chinese work, to which reference is made at the head of this notice, mentions that from the days of Yao, say twenty-three centuries before Christ, to the end of the Mongolian dynasty, in 1366, there were no less than sixty-three modifications in the system of computing time; that subsequently to the reign Ch'êng Hua of the Ming dynasty, which reign ended in 1486, the almanac fell into great confusion, from which it was only extricated by the aid of Arabian astronomers. Later still, it was hopelessly confused again; and its rectification in the early years of the reign K'ang Hsi, it will be remembered, was one of the chief causes of the ascendancy which the Jesuits obtained.

The Chinese philologist will tell us, that the year is classically either *nien*, *sui*, *ssü*, or *tsai*, each term having been first employed by a different one of the dynasties preceding our era.

The word *nien*, used by T'ang Yü, B.C. 2200, is the period within which the five kinds of grain, the different products of the field, ripen; say the year from harvest to harvest. The word *sui*, literally "to overstep", was the year as implying a complete revolution of the heavenly bodies. This was used under the Hsia, B.C. eighteen odd centuries.

The word *ssü*, which, etymologically considered, is connected with sacrifices, *inter alia*, sacrifices to the dead, thence completion or accomplishment, is the year of four seasons completed. This was used under the Shang, B.C. twelve odd centuries.

Tsai, properly "a carriage", thence "to fill", thence to fulfil, is the annual revival of nature.

The winter is *yüeh*, "the moon"; the day, *jih*, "the sun"; although popularly *t'ien*, "a sky" or "heaven" is common for the latter. The fortnightly term is *chieh ling*; the first word signifying "a joint of bamboo", thence a section; the second, "a command", thence a presiding influence.
